DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 101 CS 502 458

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TITLE Are We Preparing Teachers to Teach Communication Skills?
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Speech Communication Association (Biloxi, Mississippi, April 11-14, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Composition (Literary); *Curriculum Design; *English Curriculum; *English Instruction; Higher Education; *Language Arts; Listening Skills; *Preservice Education; Reading Instruction; Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

Although English teachers must spend 40 to 60% of their teaching time in developing the listening, composition, reading, and speech skills of their students, most college English programs allow only 8% of the professional course time for teacher preparation in these skill areas. Even in those colleges that offer a language arts major, the majority of course requirements are in literature. To provide prospective teachers with a central view of language, the communication arts courses must be brought together under the supervision of one department, and a new kind of major in communication arts must be devised. This major would include the following required courses: English courses in the rhetoric of oral and written composition, the understanding of language structure, and the understanding of literary genre; speech courses that focus on the oral interpretation of literature, listening debate and discussion, acting, and directing; developmental and remedial reading courses; a course on the psychological foundation of reading; and an introduction to journalism. (MAI)

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Are We Preparing Teachers To Teach Communication Skills?

by Dr. Lewis Rutherford

Proposition #1

Richard Perry, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Toledo, writes in The Organized Organization: The American University and Its Administration (1971):

> University education at present and during the past five years, has found itself consistently criticized for its lack of relevance, its inability to satisfy the educational "needs of our time," and for its lack of positive and defensible actions in the face of student dissatisfaction.[1]

Perry's remarks are not inappropriate. In fact, they are personified in what has happened in the state colleges and universities regarding the communication skills. Departments of Speech and English are experiencing no increase in numbers of students. Most are experiencing a decline. When students are asked why they do not choose these areas as a major, the response is, "I cannot get a job." County superintendents substantiate this charge. They state:

1. English majors cannot teach Speech,
2. English majors cannot coach debate,
3. English majors cannot direct plays,
4. Speech majors cannot teach English,
5. Speech majors cannot teach journalism,
6. Speech majors cannot put out school papers,
7. Speech majors cannot put out school annuals
8. Neither the Speech nor English major can teach developmental or remedial reading,
9. Neither can teach listening.

Usually, there are not enough reading or speech courses in a school to justify a full-time person for either. In most cases, the superintendent must hire one person to do all of the above. He will usually hire an English teacher who is pretty good at teaching English and pretty poor at teaching speech, reading, and listening. Consequently, students are exposed to an inferior education. This is not to say that teachers do not make the most of

[1] Richard Perry, The Organized Organization: The American University and Its Administration, (Toledo: The University of Toledo Press, 1971), p. 119.

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what they are trained to do; rather, it is to say that their education has ill prepared them for today's job.

After reviewing the State Standards for Certification in English, I have noted the following:

First, almost no mention is made of teaching listening.

Note that no courses are required in listening, yet thousands of studies have confirmed listening as an art. It is probably the most used or misused language art. In 1930 Rankin discovered that 45 percent of all communication time was spent listening.[1] By 1956 research studies by Nichols had raised this figure to 70 percent.[2]

Second, it is possible that the present English major may be graduated and certified to teach English with almost no hours in composition. Yet, reports in 1973 reveal that successful English faculty spent about 15.7 percent of their time teaching composition.[3] They should teach much more.

Third, the English major is, at present, required to take almost no courses in reading. Most take one class, yet it is estimated "that as many as one-third of our school children do not read well enough to meet the requirements of school and society."[4]

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[1]Paul Rankin. "Listening Ability: Its Importance and Development." Chicago School Journal, 12 (1930).

[2]R. G. Nichols, "He Who Has Ears," National Education Association Journal, 45 (1956), p. 15.

[3]William J. Ellena, Curriculum Handbook for School Executives. American Association of School Administrators, Virginia, (1973), p. 112.

[4]Robert Karlin, Teaching Elementary Reading. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, p. 1 (1971).

Numerous studies have shown that more than 50 percent of the students entering our high schools are 1.1 to 5.1 below their grade norms.[1] Arno Jewett cites instruction in reading as one of the most significant movements in the high schools today.[2] The need for reading instruction in high school is clearly substantiated in chapter three of George D. Spache's book, Toward Better Reading.[3] Emerald Dechant cites three of the most important stumbling blocks to the development of reading programs in the high school:

1. Teachers are not trained or qualified to teach reading.
2. Reading programs are not organized properly.
3. Schools are unwilling to budget for reading programs.[4]

In spite of these facts, there are no requirements in reading for the English major.

Fourth, the present English major is required to take almost no courses in speech. Most take only one. Yet, when he or she is employed, there is a good change that he or she will be requested to teach some speech, to coach debate, or to direct plays. How well can he or she do this with his or her education? Again, a teacher must use oral communication as the primary tool of the trade. What skill and what mastery can be attained with one required course of three hours?

What kind of education can a teacher provide who has had little or no training in reading, listening or composition?

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[1]Bernard E. Donovan. Survey of Reading Abilities of Public Entering the Academic High Schools in September, 1955. (New York: Board of Education, 1955), p. 1.

[2]Arno Jewett. "National Trends in Teaching High School English." English Journal, 46 (September, 1957), pp. 326-29.

[3]George Spache. Toward Better Reading, Garrard, Champaign, Illinois, 1968, p. 45.

[4]Emerald Dechant. Reading Improvement in the Secondary School, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, (1973), pp. 10-11.

Proposition #2

According to a recent report, (1973) by the National Council of Teachers of English, approximately 40 to 60 percent of the teacher's time is spent teaching skills embraced under the general term English.[1] But, only 8 percent of the professional course time is spent on preparation for this task.[2]

Several states have recently instituted a Language Arts Major, perhaps to rectify the above situation. Yet, a close look at the requirements for that major reveals about the same conclusions as the English major: almost no course requirements in listening, reading, and the possibility of being graduated with little or no training in composition. In fact, most of the course requirements are in literature.

This kind of requirement in English and Language Arts perpetuates a want of learning in the most vital and most needed areas of the language arts. It also perpetuates the self-defeating kind of teaching deplored by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1973:

> In the past, many teachers taught English as a series of separate subjects: reading from 9:00 to 9:20 a.m. and spelling from 11:00 to 11:20 a.m. or literature on Monday, grammar on Tuesday, and composition on Thursday. They failed to see that the processes of reading, spelling, speech, and applying usage and grammar are bound together through an awareness of basic linguistic processes. Teachers strengthen the entire K-12 sequency when they relate its various parts to a central view of language study.[3]

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[1] Ellena, p. 104.

[2] Ellena, p. 112.

[3] Ellena, p. 105.

Of course, the key questions are, "How can teachers be taught a central view of language study?" and "How can a K-12 sequence be established?" I think that an answer is impossible under the present system. First, the various communication departments--reading, English, and speech--are located on opposite sides of campus. They seldom see each other or know what the other is doing. Generally, no effort whatsoever is made to interrelate the programs. Second, the most vital and most necessary communication courses are minimized in the curriculum.

II. THE SOLUTION

The solution to this problem has two parts. First, the communication arts must be brought together as one department under one administrator. Second, a new kind of communication arts major must be constructed. Each of its requirements must be justifiable. I propose the following:

English	
Rhetoric of Oral and Written Composition (Composition)	9
Understanding of Language Structure (Grammar)	3
Understanding Literary Genres (Literature)	6
Speech	
Oral Interpretation of Literature	3
Listening (inter-personal communication)	6
Debate and Discussion	6
Acting and Directing	3
Reading	
Developmental and Remedial Reading	6
Psychological Foundation of Reading	3
Journalism	3
	48 hours

Why Rhetoric of Oral and Written Composition? To begin with, teachers must teach composition. Thus, they should be trained to do so. What kind of training? The National Council of Teachers of English provides the answer:

> New programs in English are placing great emphasis. . . on both principles of rhetoric. . .and methods of rhetorical analysis derived from the re-study of classical rhetoricians and from modern scholarship in communication.[1]

Teachers are also relating such principles and methods of oral and written discourse, seeing in the composition program a way of developing understandings pertinent to speech as well as writing.[2] For example, both oral and written communication have similar elements: sender, receiver, and a message. It is as important for the reader or listener to know who the speaker or writer is as it is for the speaker or writer to know who the receiver will be. Indeed, both the oral and written message are constructed after careful consideration of pertinent elements regarding the sender and the receiver. At the same time, the message of both oral and written communication possess similar elements: invention, arrangement, and style. Why should those things be duplicated by separate departments? Such is the justification for Rhetoric of Oral and Written Composition.

Second, why a course in understanding language structure? A mastery of the language system is necessary for accurate and effective communication. Most linguists and many reading specialists agree that successful programs in reading should be based on the consistent structures of the English language.[3] For example, to achieve proficiency in spelling and reading, the child must translate the sounds of English and the language patterns into written language.[4]

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[1] Ellena, p. 114

[2] Ellena, p. 114

[3] Ibid, p. 105

[4] Ellena, p. 105

Ability to manipulate the possible variations within a sentence distinguishes meaning. It also distinguishes the articulate person from the inarticulate, the effective from the ineffective.[1] According to the NCTE,

> The newer English programs display extensive concern with multi-level meanings of words in various contexts, with persuasive language, with metaphorical or imaginative language, with information and evaluation language, and with the purposes to which language is put.[2]

In short, we need an understanding of language structure in order to read, write, listen, and speak accurately and effectively.

Third, why should one include courses in understanding literary genres? In the past, literature courses have stressed historical and biographical matters at the expense of the literary work. Instead of illuminating the literary work, history and biography consumed valuable time for study of the work itself. Again, it is impossible today to read and digest all the various literary works of any country or any historical period. Thus "emphasis on literary history or thematic organization seems less in favor now."[3] Today, it is considered more important to provide students with insights into the nature of the discipline.

A knowledge and a mastery of the elements of literature, language, and rhetoric should enable the student to gain sufficient understanding of the various literary genres. Consequently, he could cope with any work that he should contact in the future. So, it seems far more important to study the fundamental principles of literary genres and apply them to a significant number of excellent models that personify the principles than to attempt to cover broad historical periods or themes.

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[1] Ibid, p. 107

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid, p. 118

Fourth, why oral interpretation of literature? Some works of literary genres were meant to be read aloud: poems, plays, ballads, fables, tales, orations, etc. If the teacher is not a master of oral interpretation, it is not likely that he/she could read these in such a way as to get at the necessary meaning or to interest students. I doubt, too, that he/she could teach students to read orally or to receive the meaning from oral genres if she did not know or did not possess a mastery of the fundamental principles of oral interpretation. The oral genres should instigate and perk student interest in literature through creative dramatics, role playing, and dramatic improvisation. Without oral interpretation, such student interest may never come into existence.

Fifth, why listening? It is the language art that we use most, i.e., from 45 to 70 percent of the time.

Sixth, why debate and discussion? As long as men encounter problems and differences of opinion and so long as they remain free to discuss these problems, there will be a natural impulse to resolve these differences reasonably and amicably.[1]

Any dramatic society must make wide use of discussion and debate in private and public councils of all kinds. Again, the teacher needs these skills to teach effectively. Last, she can also use them if she is asked to coach debate.

Seventh, why acting and directing? These skills are needed in teaching literature, in teaching and delivery of an oration, and in directing the high school play.

Eighth, why courses in reading? The rationale for this was established earlier in this paper. Fifty percent of the students entering high school are below their grade norms.

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[1]James A. McBurney and Glen E. Mills. Argumentation and Debate. MacMillan, (1964), p. 12.

Ninth, why journalism? English teachers must put out the school paper and the annual.

III. INFERENCES

The communication comprehensive major herein proposed will prepare teachers for today's classroom. Our students will be better prepared for today's responsibilities and will be educated to prepare their students for the responsibilities inherent in a free and democratic society.